

How to Prepare for an Interview

Prepared by
State Personnel Board
Examination and Selection
Services Section

PREPARING FOR AN ORAL EXAMINATION

The following is to assist you in preparing for civil service examinations. Because most examinations are very competitive and because your entire score may depend on how well you present yourself, you should make every effort to prepare well in advance of the oral examination. Keep in mind that the panel may not necessarily be looking for a right answer, rather, they will evaluate your creativity in resolving a given problem and/or your ability to reason logically.

Preparation

1. Obtain a copy of the exam announcement and the classification specification sheet (available from the State Personnel Board.) Study the exam announcement, the specification sheet, and be prepared in the interview to:
 - a. Explain the duties, functions, and responsibilities of the position/classification.
 - b. Match your experience to the requirements for admittance to the examination for the classification and the knowledge and abilities listed in the "scope" for the oral examination.
 - c. Provide examples of personal or special characteristics, such as, willingness and ability to accept increased responsibility and ability to work under pressure.
 - d. Discuss education, work record, self-development, job knowledge, interpersonal skills, adaptability, and or supervisory experience (if applicable).
2. Research the classification, office, department. Read laws, policies, reports, pamphlets, news accounts, budget and manuals.
3. Write out answers to the most obvious kinds of questions. (Please see sample questions provide at the end). In addition, develop your own lists of questions by asking yourself what you would want to know if you were in the interviewer.
4. Participate in practice interview sessions with co-workers, family members, friends, supervisor, and / or managers.

5. Practice asking and answering questions with a tape recorder . You will probably discover that your responses are not as refined as they should be. Using the tape recorder will provide you with an opportunity to polish your presentation.
6. Review your application, resume, and/or appraisals (EDA, PRE, Rule 200) before you go to the interview.
7. Get plenty of rest the night before the interview.
8. Dress appropriately for the interview. If you need advice on how to dress for success, check your local library for books on the subject.
9. Arrive at the interview at least five minutes early. If you are rushing to your interview at the last minute, you run the risk of being late.

If you prepare for your interview according to the suggestions above, you will greatly increase your chance of making a good impression.

Your Presentation

1. Attitude - As you present yourself, you must exhibit confidence and enthusiasm. You will need to show the panel that you can control your nervousness and that you care about this opportunity to present yourself.

In addition to enthusiasm, remain aware of your body language and speech.

- a. Sit comfortably in the chair and avoid fidgeting.
 - b. Make eye contact with the panel. Face each panelist as he/she asks a question, but look at everyone when responding.
 - c. Use the pronoun "I" rather than "we" when you tell the panelists about your work experience. They want to know about what you have done, not what your unit or office has accomplished.
 - d. Avoid negative terms such as "only" or "just" because they have a minimizing effect on your skills, education, experience, etc. Avoid any responses that the panel may view as putting yourself down.
2. Speak loudly enough so that the panelists can hear you.

3. Support your statements with examples. If you offer examples without being asked, you will show the panel that you have prepared for the interview and that you know what you are talking about.

Panel Evaluation

The panel will assess your qualifications/competitiveness based on the following key points of an effective presentation:

1. The breadth and depth of the information that you provide concerning your skills, education, and work experience (was your answer sufficient?).
2. Your ability to analyze situations and take an effective course of action.
3. How well you understand the questions being asked.
4. Your ability to communicate.
5. How directly you responded to the questions (avoid skirting around the issue).
6. Your knowledge of the classification applied for.
7. Your display of genuine interest and enthusiasm for working in the class being tested.
8. Your attitude and aptitude for accepting increased responsibilities.
9. Your ability to relate experience to the position/classification you are being interviewed for.
10. The flexibility and adaptability of your responses.

If you are not satisfied with your presentation, you may contact the chairperson for feedback after the list has been published. The chairperson will then be able to offer constructive criticism to help you prepare for future oral interviews.

Sample Questions

The following are sample questions that may be asked in oral interviews. If you are prepared to answer them clearly and completely, you will feel confident about your presentation.

General Questions

Tell the panel why you feel qualified to be a _____(class)_____ at this time. What are the most important/difficult duties of your present position?

Why do you want to leave your present position?

How do you organize your work?

What is the primary function of _____(class)_____?

How much training have you had? Examples?

How much formal education have you had?

What have you done to prepare for appointment to this classification?

Have you had any difficulties in previous positions?

What do you have to offer for this position or classification?

Describe your strong/weak points on the job. (When discussing weak points, always end on a positive note by telling them what you are doing or have done to correct this.)

In what ways are you preparing yourself for career advancement?

Where do you plan on being in your career 2 years from now? 5 years?

Sample Questions for Analytical Positions

How would you conduct a survey?

What basic steps would you follow to solve a problem?

Have you written an issue paper? If so, please explain.

What is completed staff work?

How does your job contribute to the goals of your office? The department?

How do you determine priorities in your present position?

How do you go about getting additional responsibilities in your present position?

Have you spoken before groups?

Have you made a presentation to your Office Chief? Director?

Name a current issue facing your department.

Give an example of a project you were assigned because of your special skill or experience.

Of what single accomplishment are you most proud?

How would your supervisor describe your writing/speaking skills?

What is a primary objective of your unit/section/office?

How do you keep up with current trends/information/technology/policies in your present position?

Sample Questions for Managerial Positions

As a manager, what would be your responsibility towards affirmative action?

How would you handle a request from upper management to reduce your office staff?

If a union representative came to the work site to talk to employees without first obtaining your approval, how would you handle the situation?

Sample Questions for Supervisory Positions

What is the extent of your supervisory experience?

What is the role of a supervisor?

What is the most important quality you think a supervisor should possess?

What do you think is the most difficult task of a supervisor?

What is the main difference between a supervisory and a journey position?

Since you have no supervisory experience, what else could you offer to offset this lack of experience?

What would you do with an employee who is habitually tardy?

What steps would you take to train an employee?

How would you present a policy that you did not agree with to your subordinates?

As a supervisor, what is your responsibility towards affirmative action?

What is the role of collective bargaining?

PREPARING FOR YOUR ORAL INTERVIEW

1. The written test often is designed to determine, on a pass/fail basis, the technical knowledge possessed by the candidate; the oral interview often is designed to evaluate relatively intangible qualities which are not readily measured otherwise, and to establish a list of eligibles that reflect the relative readiness of each candidate, as measured against other competitors in that examination for the positions in the classification for which the examination is being given. Scoring is not on the basis of "right" or "wrong", but on a sliding scale of values ranging from "not passable" to "outstanding". As a matter of fact, it is possible to achieve a relatively low score without a single "incorrect" answer because of your evident weakness, on a competitive basis, in the qualities (Critical Class Requirements) being assessed in the interviews for that particular examination.
2. Some examinations consist entirely of an oral interview. In such cases, information may be sought during the interview concerning the technical knowledge, skills and abilities of the candidate, since there has been no written test for this purpose. More commonly, at least at the lower salary levels, an interview is used to supplement a written test.

Before Your Interview

1. Keep a copy of your application and review it carefully before the interview. This could be the only document that the oral interview panel has before the interview begins. Panels often use it as the starting point of the interview. Know the sequence and dates of the experience and education you have listed on the application. Frequently, the interview panel will ask you to summarize the highlights of your education and experience. You should prepare in advance, a brief oral summary of those aspects of your background that you think make you a well-qualified competitor in that examination. If you do not think you will be able to remember enough during your interview, it is all right to glance at your copy of your application to refresh your memory as you make your presentation to the interview panel. You could also make an outline of the major points you want to cover during the interview and attach the outline to your copy of the application form.
2. Study the class specification and the examination announcement. The oral panel will have both of these to guide them. The knowledge, abilities, skills and personal characteristics pertinent to the classification for which the examination is being given are stated in these documents. They offer valuable clues as to the possible nature of the oral interview. For example, if the classification involves supervisory responsibilities, the announcement

usually will indicate that knowledge of supervisory methods and the qualifications of the candidate as a supervisor or potential supervisor will be covered. If so, you can expect questions about your supervisory training, experience and knowledge, frequently in the form of a hypothetical situation which you are expected to solve. Never go into an oral interview without any knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of the classification for which the examination is being administered. Talk in advance to incumbents in the class, their supervisors and others about the work of the classification concerned, so you can demonstrate to the interview panel that you are interested in being hired or promoted to that classification by showing that you have taken the time to find out about the work of the class in detail.

3. Think through each qualification required. Try to think of the kind of questions you would ask if you were a member of the interview panel. How well can you answer those questions? Try especially to appraise your own knowledge and background in each area, measured against the requirements of the classification concerned. In addition to identifying your strengths, identify any areas in which you are apt to be weak, in comparison with the other competitors. Be prepared to tell the interview panel, if they point out the weaknesses, what you are doing and have done to overcome those weaknesses. Do not dwell on what you would like to do in the future.
4. Do some general reading in areas in which you feel you may be weak. For example, if the job involves supervision and your past experience has not included supervising others, some general reading about supervisory methods and practices, particularly in the field of human relations, might be useful. It may be helpful to study agency procedures or detailed manuals, such as the Personnel Board's Handbook for Supervisors.
5. Get a good night's sleep and watch your health and mental attitude. You'll want a clear head at the interview. Take care of a cold or other minor ailments. Do not take any stimulants or tranquilizers before your interview unless your doctor prescribes them and you are positive, based on your experience, that they will help you to improve your presentation.

What To Do The Day Of The Interview

1. Give yourself plenty of time to get there. Plan to arrive somewhat ahead of the scheduled time, particularly if your appointment is in the early part of the day. If a previous candidate fails to appear, the oral interview panel might be ready for you a bit early. By late afternoon, the oral interview panel might be behind schedule if there are many candidates, and you may have to wait. You

may want to take along a book or magazine to read, in addition to having your application to review. In any event, try to relax and compose yourself. Remember that even the calmest, most self-assured people usually are somewhat nervous before their oral interview.

2. The matter of dress is important. The oral interview panel is forming impressions about you from your pertinent education and experience, your manners, your attitudes, the way you express yourself, and your appearance. Give your personnel appearance careful attention. Dress your best, but not your flashiest. Choose clothing appropriate for the situation and job, and be sure it and you are immaculate. This is a business interview, and your appearance should indicate that you regard it as such.
3. As soon as you arrive at the interview area, find out the names of the panel members. You may want to ask someone (such as the receptionist) and then make a note to yourself of how to pronounce those names if they seem to you to be difficult to pronounce.

Starting The Interview

1. The chairperson usually will introduce you to the other panel members when you enter the interview room. After acknowledging introductions, sit down. The interview will now begin.
2. Usually, the chairperson will start by briefly reviewing some of the highlights of your background from your application. Do not interrupt or quibble unless there are important misinterpretations. Often, you may be asked a general question to help you get started, such as, "What aspects of your background do you think have best prepared you for promotion to this classification?" Other members of the panel may join in on the questioning. The interview is now under way. The members of the panel will proceed to ask you the kinds of questions they feel will give them ideas of your potential for the jobs in the classification in question.

Making Interview Questions Work For You

1. Remember that the interview panel's job is to help you do your best. At times, you might feel that the panel individually and collectively is trying to seek out only your negative attributes. Actually, this is not true. They are obliged to make a fair and impartial appraisal of your qualifications for the classification in question, considering both your strengths and your weaknesses, and they want to see you in your best light. Remember, they

must interview all candidates, and a noncooperative or complaining candidate may not do well in the interview in spite of their best efforts to bring out the candidate's strongest attributes. Your job is to help the interview panel to see you at your best.

2. Be natural. Keep your attitude enthusiastic and confident, but not cocky. If you are not reasonably confident that you can do the job, do not expect the interview panel to be. Do not apologize for your weaknesses; try to bring out your strong points. The interview panel is interested in a positive, not a negative presentation. Cockiness and verbosity might be apt to antagonize the panel members and make them wonder if you are covering up a weakness by false show of strength. On the other hand, try to use more than a couple of words when you answer each of the panel's questions.
3. Get comfortable, but don't lounge or sprawl. Sit erectly but not stiffly. A careless posture may lead the interview panel to conclude that you are not impressed by the importance of the occasion. This conclusion is natural, even if incorrect. Do not fuss with your clothing or with a pencil. Your hands may occasionally be useful to emphasize a point, but don't let your hands detract from your presentation by becoming a point of distraction.
4. Be pleasant, but don't wisecrack or initiate extensive small talk. This is a business situation, and your attitude should show that you consider it as such. Furthermore, the interview panel's time is limited; the panel does not want to waste it, and neither should you. However, participate appropriately if a panel member chooses to make small talk at the beginning of the interview in order to make you feel more comfortable.
5. Don't exaggerate your experience or abilities. In the first place, from information in the application, from other interviews, and, in promotional examinations, other sources, the panel may know more about you than you think; in the second place, you probably will not get away with it. An experienced interview panel is rather adept at spotting such a situation. Don't take this chance.
6. If you know a member of the interview panel, don't make an obvious point of it; yet, don't hide it. Remain as natural as possible. Go ahead and present your strong points to the panel rather than waiting for the person you know to do so.
7. Don't dominate the interview. Let the interview panel do that. The panel will give you the clues. Don't assume that you have to do all the talking. Realize that the panel has a number of questions to ask each candidate. Don't try to take up all the interview time by showing off your extensive knowledge. On the other hand, be sure you have prepared in advance to

present the highlights of your strengths to the panel when they ask you for them (or at the end of the interview if they have not been mentioned earlier in the interview).

8. Be attentive. Usually, your interview lasts only 15 to 20 minutes or so, and you should keep your attention at its sharpest throughout. When a panel member is addressing a problem or a question to you, give that person your undivided attention. Address your reply principally to that person, but do not exclude eye contact with the other members of the panel.
9. Don't interrupt. Panel members may be starting a problem for you to analyze. They will ask a question when the time comes. Let the problem be stated and wait for the question.
10. Make sure you understand the question. Don't try to answer until you are sure what the question is. If it is not clear, restate it in your own words or ask the panel member to clarify it for you. But do not haggle about minor elements.
11. Reply promptly but not hastily. Respond as promptly and quickly as you can, but do not jump to hasty, ill-considered answer. It is all right to pause for a couple of seconds before answering. Try not to stare at the window, wall or ceiling while formulating your answer, though.
12. Don't answer questions as rapidly as possible. A brief answer is proper, but do not fire your answers back in a very rapid manner. This is a losing game from your point of view. The interview panel members can probably ask questions much faster than you can answer them.
13. Don't try to create the answer you think the panel member wants. The panel is interested in how you analyze and solve problems, not in playing games. If you give an answer that you really do not think is correct, you may have difficulty defending the correctness of the answer if the panel members then ask you questions about your answer.
14. Don't switch sides in your reply merely to agree with a panel member. Sometimes a panel member will appear to support the reverse of your answer merely to draw you out and to see if you are willing and able to defend your point of view. Do not start a heated debate; yet, do not surrender a good position. If a position is worth taking, it is worth defending.

15. Don't be afraid to admit an error in judgement if you are shown to be wrong. The panel knows that you are forced to reply without the opportunity for careful, prolonged consideration of the issue. Your answer may be demonstrably wrong. If so, admit it and get on with the interview.
16. Don't dwell at length on your present job. The opening question in the interview may relate to your present assignment. Answer the question by citing the highlights of your job, but do not go into an extended discussion of every job duty assigned to you. You are being examined for a new classification, not your present one. As a matter of fact, try to phrase all your answers in terms of the work of the classification for which you are being examined.
17. Don't bring in extraneous comments or tell lengthy anecdotes. Keep your replies to the point. If you feel that need of an illustration from your personal experience, keep it short. Leave out any minor details. Make sure the incident is real and not imaginary. If you think you might be giving the interview panel too much detail on a specific point, you may want to ask them whether they would like you to elaborate further.

MAKING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WORK FOR YOU

1. Remember that the interviewers' job is to help you do your best, and they want to see you in your best light. Your job is to help the interview panel to see you at your best.
2. Be natural. Keep your attitude enthusiastic and confident, but not cocky.
3. Get comfortable, but don't lounge or sprawl.
4. Be pleasant, but don't wisecrack or initiate extensive small talk.
5. Don't exaggerate your experience or abilities.
6. If you know a member of the interview panel, don't make an obvious point of it; yet, don't hide it.
7. Don't dominate the interview.
8. Be attentive.
9. Don't interrupt.
10. Make sure you understand the question.
11. Reply promptly but not hastily.
12. Don't answer questions as rapidly as possible.
13. Don't try to create the answer you think the interviewer wants to hear.
14. Don't switch sides in your reply merely to agree with the interviewer.
15. Don't be afraid to admit an error in judgement if you are shown to be wrong.
16. Don't dwell at length on your present job.
17. Don't bring extraneous comments or tell lengthy anecdotes.
18. Don't be technical or ponderous.
19. Don't use slang terms or use words improperly.
20. Present your strengths in terms of how you could be of benefit to the employer if hired.

ADVICE ON TAKING ORAL INTERVIEWS

1. Prepare your applications or resume carefully. It should be legible, detailed, and concise. Remember, this is the first view of you, and it should represent you the way you want to be seen.
2. Know the job for which you are interviewing. Read the exam bulletin, job specification, and any other applicable material. Talk to several people already in that job classification and find out what they do.
3. Review a copy of your application before the interview so you know what the panel is seeing about you. Be prepared to discuss all items on the application if necessary.
4. The scope of the interview will generally be designed to cover the knowledge and ability you have of the job. Think about this and be prepared to answer questions in these areas. Be prepared to discuss your past experience and how you see it relating and qualifying you for the job for which you are interviewing.
5. Be good to yourself the day of the interview. If you feel good, you will portray a positive image.
6. Dress appropriately. Dress your best and be sure you are immaculate. This is a business interview, and your appearance should indicate that you understand that.
7. You are competing. Do not be passive. When asked a question, respond directly. Avoid one word responses like "yes" or "no". Questions are meant to give you an opportunity to present information that is important and meaningful. By the same token, you will want to avoid "speeches" which are not applicable.
8. Speak up and make eye contact. Be confident -- nobody knows more about you than you.
9. If there are points you want to cover, do not be afraid to take a card with notes to the interview. Do not read from the card, but do not forget the information either.

10. Never complain about such things as "the system" or "management" or my "lousy supervisor". Expressing unrest may hurt you.
11. Answer questions in terms of what is good for the organization, not only what is good for you.
12. Do not put yourself down. You want the panel to see you as the best candidate; and if you are negative about yourself, the panel may also doubt you.
13. Be enthusiastic about yourself, past jobs, and things you would like to do in the future.
14. There should always be a time near the end of every interview when you will be asked if you have anything to add. You should be prepared to add something positive the panel may not have brought up. You may wish to use this time to reiterate something you would like to stress. You want the interview to end on a strong, positive note.

REASONS APPLICANTS ARE REJECTED OR SCORE LOW DURING AN INTERVIEW

Inability to express him / herself clearly - poor voice, diction, grammar

Lack of planning for a career - no purpose and goals

Unwilling to start at bottom - expects too much too soon

Makes excuses - hedges on unfavorable factors in record

Lack of tact

Lack of maturity

Lack of courtesy - ill mannered

Talks negatively about past employers

Indecision - evasiveness

Sloppy application or resume

Merely shopping around - not really interested in company

Wants job only for short time

Little sense of humor

Lack of knowledge of what job is about

Emphasis on who you know

Unwillingness to go where the company needs you to work

Cynical, know-it-all

Intolerant - strong prejudices

Narrow interests - inflexible

Lack of appreciation of the value of experience

Late to interview without good reason

High - pressure type

TIPS AND ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE ASKED IN INTERVIEWS

- A. Always look presentable. Tend to dress toward a conservative business image. For additional information on dress, please consult John T. Molloy's dress for success books for men and women.
- B. The secret to a successful interview is extensive preparation and a clear, concise, confident, friendly and enthusiastic presentation. In your presentation make sure that you cite examples of what you have done and do not forget to mention your accomplishments and achievements.
- C. More often than not a "crowd" of people will be interviewing for various positions. What will separate you from all those other people that may be as well qualified as you? Please note the following:
 - 1. Preparation - The key - Practice your presentation.
 - 2. Self-knowledge - Know your background.
 - 3. Genuine desire for the position.
 - 4. Knowledge of the position - Job specifications
 - 5. A concise and cogent presentation.
 - 6. A presentation with examples.
 - 7. Accomplishments and achievements must be mentioned where appropriate.
 - 8. Communicate that you are a person who has a high degree of self-worth or self esteem - You like yourself.
 - 9. Be enthusiastic - This is a joy to the interviewer as well as yourself.
 - 10. Talk to others that have the position you want, find out what is really done in that position.
 - 11. Know your strengths.
 - 12. Know your weaknesses and be able to state what you have been doing to overcome them.

13. Know why you want to be a _____.
14. Be able to communicate how you have prepared to assume the duties of the position you are applying or interviewing for.
15. Know how this job fits into your overall plans.
16. Know what your career plans are.
17. Talk about hobbies that you have that will help you do a great job.
18. Ask for clarification of any questions you do not understand.
19. Control the interview by providing information that you want to give.
20. Respond positively if someone expresses reservations about your qualifications. This is an opportunity for you to shine.
21. Be poised and have good posture.
22. Guard against loud perfume or cologne.
23. Treat your interviewer with respect even if you think you know more than they do.
24. Have your presentation down cold.
25. Think of a powerful closing statement that demonstrates why you are the best person for the position.
26. Be there on time.
27. Do not allow the interviewer(s) to make you angry. If this happens, you have already lost.
28. Let your presentation flow.

General Tips For Job Interviewing

I. Punctuality:

Be on time. Don't be 15 minutes or an hour early. If an emergency arises - flat tire, etc., call the prospective employer as soon as possible and explain the problem.

II. Appropriate Dress:

Don't wear blue jeans, tennis shoes, hair curlers, etc., for office positions.

Don't wear a 3 piece suit or high heels and a white dress for factory or shop-type position.

III. Application:

1. Complete the application fully. Most applications are two sided or fold out. Don't forget to sign it.
2. Have reference names and addresses with you as well as your social security card.
3. On the application or in your resume, be sure to include any volunteer work you have done either in the area on the application designated for work experience or in the remarks area.
4. Spelling is very important. Do not neglect this aspect of your application or resume.

IV. Resume:

If you are presenting a resume, be sure it is neat, grammatically correct and SHORT. As a general rule, resumes should not be more than one typewritten page. You should present an original, typewritten document or a GOOD copy. Be sure you have proof-read for spelling and typographical errors.

V. Interview:

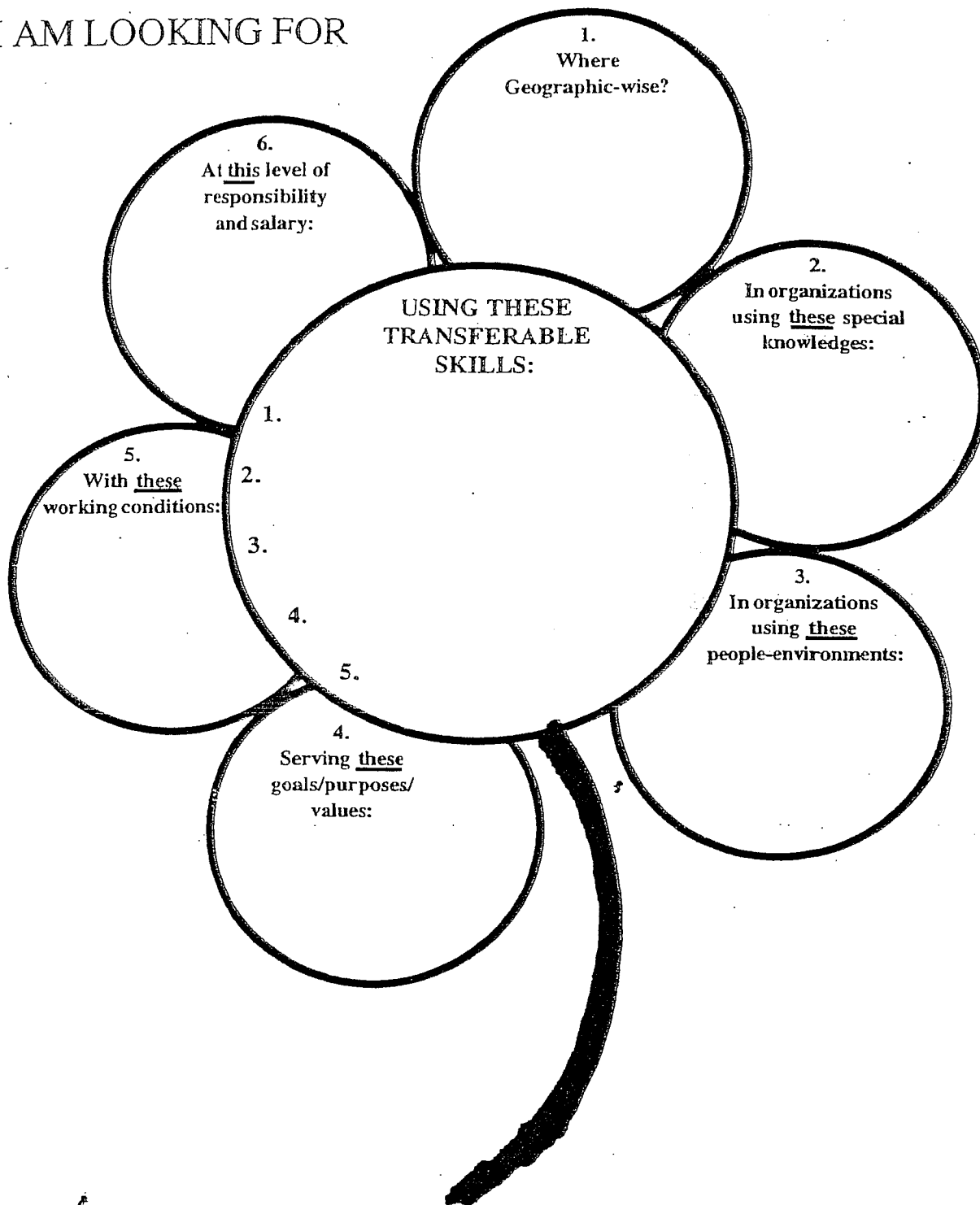
1. Act interested (if you are not interested after learning what the position

entails, tell the interviewer it is not what you are looking for). Don't waste the interviewer's time or yours in an interview for a position you don't want.

2. Ask intelligent questions about the position (this will give you a good idea of whether or not you do want the job).
3. DON'T slouch, yawn or appear generally disinterested.
4. DON'T ask about pay or benefits until the interview is nearing a close. If these items have not been discussed by that point is proper to ask. Never open an interview asking about pay and benefits.

The Flower:

A PICTURE OF THE JOB I AM LOOKING FOR



USEFUL TIPS FOR FILLING OUT EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION FORMS

Don't be careless. Do it carefully. Your application is the first impression you make on the employer-- explain the quality of work you do and your ability to think and follow instructions.

Don't resent questions pertaining to your personal affairs. Why? Because the employer wants to know about your background so an evaluation in relation to the job openings may be made.

Don't hedge on questions like education, experience and age. Give exact facts. Put it on the line, be frank and honest if these questions are asked.

Be prepared, have the information you will need at the tip of your fingers.

Have names and addresses of references and former employers with you. Don't ask for the telephone book to look them up.

Carry a pen and use your own pen when filling out the application. Don't ask to borrow one from the employer.

Fill out the blanks quickly and accurately. It speaks well of efficiency.

Be sure to follow all instructions on the application form.

Be neat. No erasures, no perspiration smudges, print unless a writing sample is needed for that job, or unless the application calls for a signature.

Be accurate: read the application through first so you don't answer a question in the wrong place. It helps to write out answers on a separate page first to get the wording just right. Another technique is to secure a duplicate application ahead of time and fill it out to use it as a reference for the final.

Check the spellings of names and places. Have addresses and proper dates available before you go (carry a sheet with all this information with you). Be sure to list any experience including part time and volunteer if applicable to the job.

If a question is not applicable, line it out or leave the space blank if it requires special explanation (use the technique sparingly). If required attach a separate sheet with the explanation.

Application can be made more effective by expanding on duties and responsibilities in past experience and by making every answer as positive as possible.

Gear each application to the individual job (each may have differing emphasis.) Select education and experience which is applicable to the specific job for which you are applying.

On some applications, you may be able to attach a resume, ask if this is ok and if it is, then attach a resume, this can save you time and effort. Be sure to be prepared and have a resume with you to save yourself some time.